

Chapter 7: Recruitment and Retention of Participants

This chapter provides information about recruiting and retaining staff, agencies, and families. A checklist at the end of the chapter contains a number of issues the evaluation team can discuss before beginning an evaluation.

Obtaining the Cooperation of Staff

Staff play a crucial role in evaluations; a successful evaluation depends on their cooperation. However, staff may express some resistance for the following reasons:

- Evaluations can increase their workloads.
- They may be concerned about possible negative results.
- They may be concerned that the evaluation will reflect negatively on them personally.

“Law enforcement and CPS [Child Protective Services] feel stretched as it is. A change to a multidisciplinary team is a significant change.”

To help ensure staff cooperation, involve them in the planning phase and throughout all other phases of the evaluation. The director may have to convince staff that the evaluation is necessary to improve the program and may need to adjust priorities to enable staff to contribute without

feeling overburdened. Above all, staff must be given credit for their contributions to the evaluation.

Obtaining the Cooperation of the Multidisciplinary Team and Agencies

It is important to obtain the specific cooperation of the multidisciplinary team (MDT) members, as well as that of their agency’s supervisors and directors during the planning phase of the evaluation to ensure cooperation. Once the evaluation has begun, staff from the partner agencies will have extra duties (e.g., completing questionnaires) that they may resist if they were not included in the planning phase. Therefore, the evaluation team should include a representative from the MDT and ensure that the agency supervisors and directors are aware of the MDT representative’s participation in the evaluation.

The first task is to think about whose cooperation will be needed and to consider how the evaluation will impact those persons. The prospective collaborators should be informed about the following:

- Why the evaluation is being done.
- What will be gained as a result of the evaluation.
- What their involvement (if any) will be.
- The plans for the results.

“We need to be sure to include the multidisciplinary team in our evaluation planning because the centers are as much the team’s as ours.”

A starting point may be to secure agreement from the various team members’ supervisors (Boruch 1997). Supervisors can stress to team members the importance of cooperating with the evaluation, give the team members the flexibility to cooperate, and if cooperation is lacking, provide some leverage to gain the team’s cooperation.

A number of incentives can be offered to encourage team members to participate:

- **Intellectual justification.** Point out to potential partners that their participation will contribute to a better evaluation, better answers, and eventually a better program.
- **Stewardship.** Emphasize that the purpose of the Child Advocacy Center (CAC) is to facilitate and assist the MDT’s respective agencies in coordinating their response to child abuse so that client vulnerability is reduced and their well-being is enhanced. In addition, offer potential partners the opportunity to help shape the evaluation that will eventually reduce clients’ vulnerability and enhance their well-being.
- **Precedent.** If possible, point out the precedents for their agency’s participation.
- **Compensation.** If possible, offer money to help defray the cost of their participation.

- **Training opportunity.** Evaluations offer participating agencies the opportunity to learn new procedures and better ways of operating.

Credibility is the strongest asset the CAC can use to gain the cooperation of the partner agencies. Cooperating agencies also will be interested in the history, conscientiousness, and prestige of the funding agency, if these exist; scientific productivity; and perhaps most importantly, willingness to invest time in negotiating a plan that works for all involved agencies.

Obtaining the Cooperation of Parents and Children

Determining who will participate

One of the first decisions to make is to determine who will participate in the evaluation because the type of participant will determine the type of evaluation. A pipeline study can help in this process. A pipeline study focuses attention on how many individuals, what types of cases, and when individuals should be included in or excluded from the study (Boruch 1997). For example, an evaluation that focuses on children being referred to the CAC might begin by tracking all reports of child sexual abuse (CSA) in the jurisdiction and then trace the process of how and when reports are made, how cases are diverted or discovered to be ineligible, and how eligible cases enter the criminal justice system and at what point in time. Qualitative components (such as administrative records, interviews, and case analyses) might be incorporated to produce a detailed description of what decisions are made, when, and by whom. Based on this information, the evaluation team can determine who is eligible to participate.

Determining who will recruit participants

One or two individuals should be given primary responsibility for recruiting participants so the team knows who is responsible and to prevent diffusion of responsibility. To adequately convey to potential participants what their involvement will entail, the recruiter should be very familiar with the evaluation and the CAC. This person should not, however, be someone who works directly with the family, although it may be someone on staff. It is advantageous if the staff member working with the family introduces the recruiter to them to legitimize the evaluation.

Compensating participants

For some aspects of the evaluation, compensation will not be an issue. For other aspects, monetary incentives may increase the level of participation. If the evaluation is funded through a grant, it may be possible to offer participants \$5 to \$10 for their time. It is preferable to phrase the remuneration in terms of compensating participants for their time rather than their responses. However, the decision to offer clients compensation should be made in collaboration with the MDT members. Encourage the MDT to think seriously about the implications of participant compensation for the case investigation prior to making this decision.

Recruiting participants

Regardless of the type of evaluation being conducted, collecting data from individuals will be necessary, and data collection will impose an extra burden on participants because it takes time to complete surveys. For this reason, it is important to have experienced and sensitive individuals recruit participants.

Developing a recruitment strategy

Develop a strategy to recruit parents and their children for the evaluation. Evaluation teams that have included former clients (parents of a victim) find that they can be helpful in developing a strategy to which families are receptive. If the evaluation team does not include a parent, other members of the team can talk with parents at the center about their willingness to participate (referred to as “pre-evaluation consulting”). This strategy will make clients feel that they have provided valuable input into the evaluation. In addition, the center can convey to families that their ideas have been incorporated into the strategy for recruiting participants. If ideas from clients need to be elicited in a more systematic manner, another option may be to conduct a focus group with families who have been through the center (see Krueger 1988).

When developing a recruitment strategy, factors such as language, culture, and literacy should be considered. For example, many CACs have minority and foreign-born clients for whom English is a second language (or who speak only a foreign language); some centers have clients with distinct cultural backgrounds; and some centers have clients who may be functionally illiterate. Each of these factors may affect how a center recruits participants. A center with a large population of foreign-speaking clients, for example, may need to enlist a bilingual staff member to recruit and administer questionnaires to these participants. Chapter 8 discusses cultural issues that evaluators should be sensitive to and chapter 9 discusses literacy.

Recruitment instructions

Recruiters should explain to participants:

- The purpose of the study.

- That confidentiality will be maintained.
- That other families have been consulted.
- That other families have willingly agreed to participate.
- What they will be asked to do.

Information about the evaluation must be provided to participants, typically written in an informed-consent form. Participants should be informed that although they agree to participate, they may elect to withdraw at any time (see “Confidentiality”).

The appropriate attitude while recruiting is to be sympathetic but matter-of-fact. This attitude will increase cooperation from parents, children, and team members. Although recruitment may feel intrusive and awkward at first, it becomes easier to recruit potential participants with practice.

Recruiting at the center

One method for making recruitment easier for the recruiter is to write a script and rehearse it until it is almost memorized. Some recruiters find the process to be foreign at first, but the feeling quickly gives way to a relaxed approach that participants detect and willingly respond to (see exhibit 7.1 for a sample script).

Recruiting through the mail

If the evaluation entails recruiting participants after they have left the center, ask parents while they are at the center if they would be willing to complete a survey that would be sent to them after a certain period of time. The mailed survey should contain a cover letter describing the purpose of the study and what is expected of participants. Exhibit 7.2 is a sample cover letter that can be modified to reflect particular evaluations

(Beauchamp, Tewksbury, and Sanford 1997).

Recruiting via the telephone

If the evaluation entails conducting telephone interviews with participants, notify parents while they are at the center. Avoid calling parents without prior notification. If, however, the evaluation team must contact families by telephone after they have left the center, send a postcard prior to telephoning to notify parents that they will be contacted soon. If possible, also send a copy of the interview before calling, so they will know what questions to expect. Exhibit 7.3 is a telephone recruitment script that can be adapted.¹

Recruiting families at rural centers

Each center will have unique issues associated with its evaluation. Directors from rural centers have noted particular difficulty in getting families involved in group therapy, perhaps because rural families believe that small centers cannot protect their privacy. Special precautions may need to be taken to ensure the anonymity of these participants and to ensure that the MDT does not have access to their personal information. For example, a special pledge of anonymity may be designed to reflect the steps the center has taken to ensure anonymity, including the fact that no names appear on questionnaires.

Recruiting children with disabilities

Many directors have noted that a small proportion of their referrals are children who may be developmentally delayed or have a disability. Centers may be particularly interested in obtaining the perceptions of these children, and doing so may require making special arrangements. In some cases, communication with children

with special needs may require no more than simplifying the language used with them. However, this will not always be sufficient. Directors who have dealt with this issue have offered these solutions:

- Ask the clinical director to administer the questionnaire to the child.
- Talk to parents about how best to communicate with the child.
- Talk to the child's special education teacher regarding how to communicate with the child.
- Enlist a specialist to administer the questionnaire to the child.

"The biggest challenge was followup, getting information from families. When court is over, they just want to get their lives back to normal, so they don't respond to letters or phone calls."

Followup Contact With Families

If the evaluation design calls for a follow-up component, families will need to be contacted after they leave the center. Families with a history of CSA are often difficult to contact after leaving the center. This can make it difficult to obtain follow-up information, but it is critical to do so. Loss of participants (referred to as "attrition") has a tremendous impact on results. It may reduce the evaluation's ability to detect differences between groups, or it may bias the results.

Therefore, it is important to take the necessary precautions while the family is still at the CAC to ensure future contact with them. Begin by asking parents if they are willing to be contacted in the future. A

permission-to-recontact script can be used separately or in combination with an informed-consent form that contains a section about followup contacts (see exhibits 7.4 and 7.5).²

Collecting and maintaining future contact information from families

Either verbally or in the informed-consent form, ask parents for information about how to contact them in the future (referred to as "forward tracing"). Create a form that includes information that will be helpful in contacting families in the future. The following are some items to include on the form:

- Name.
- Address.
- Telephone number.
- Contact information for three or more friends or relatives.
- Current employer.
- Civic, professional, or religious organizations to which the individual belongs.
- Photographs.
- Permission-to-recontact statements.

Once participants leave the center, one way to maintain contact with them is by sending periodic communications, such as birthday cards and postcards, to let them know the CAC's staff members are thinking about them.

Locating families in the future

In spite of all best efforts, some families will be extremely difficult to contact. In such cases, the forward-tracing information may then become useful. Some

backward-tracing methods also may be successful, such as the following:

- Community resource networks.
- Current and former staff, directors, students, parents, and community leaders.
- School records, yearbooks, and directories.
- Public records, driver's licenses, marriage certificates, birth and death certificates, and voter registration records.
- Institutional resources, such as prisons, houses of worship, employers, mental health facilities, and police records.
- Welfare rolls.
- Mail, post office forwards, forwarding address requests, and forwarding by intermediaries such as parents.
- Telephone directories, standard directories, address/telephone directories, operator tracing.
- Neighborhood canvassing.

Followup schedules

If the evaluation design includes future contacts with families at specified time intervals, consider developing a schedule like exhibit 7.6 to organize followup activities. The schedule can be updated frequently to help organize this often confusing activity.

Confidentiality

Confidentiality is an important legal, ethical, and technical concept designed to protect research participants. There is a distinction between data collected for program improvement and data collected for research. In some States, informed consent is not necessary for program

improvement but is necessary for research purposes. To determine if this distinction is applicable to your center, check your State's statutes.

Typically, to conduct research with human beings through a university, the research design and protocol must be approved by a governing body consisting of a number of university and community representatives. This governing body is referred to as an institutional review board (IRB). When a request for IRB approval is submitted, a formal review of the research design and protocol is undertaken.

Although CACs are not governed by an IRB, centers may wish to coordinate with a university IRB or to establish their own IRB to ensure that the design and protocol meet ethical and legal standards and to develop and implement procedures that protect the rights of participants. Regardless of legality, it is ethical to ensure the rights of participants.

Ensuring anonymity

To ensure participant anonymity, the measurement instruments should not contain the respondent's name or other personal identifying information. One way to preserve anonymity is to use a cover sheet on the survey instrument that contains the participant's name, the title of the evaluation, and an identification number. Each page of the survey itself should contain only the identification number without any name. When the participant has completed the form, the cover sheet can be detached from the survey and filed separately. Both cover sheets and surveys should be kept in separate locked drawers. Alternatively, if names are contained on the survey, the name should be removed when the survey is complete and replaced with a code (Gunn 1987). The director should take steps to ensure that persons who are not working with the data do not have access to it.

Confidentiality procedures

To ensure ethical propriety, develop a written informed-consent form that details the purpose of the study and the rights of the participants (Boruch 1997). The informed-consent form should tell participants the following:

- All features of the research that might influence their willingness to participate.
- That they are free to decline to participate or withdraw from participation at any time.
- That there are protections from physical and mental discomfort, harm, and danger. If a risk exists, participants must be informed of the risk and strategies taken to minimize it.
- That information obtained during the course of an investigation is confidential.
- How and where the data are stored.
- How long the data will be kept.
- Who has access to the data.

Participants should read the informed-consent form and sign two copies of the form prior to completing a survey or answering interview questions. Participants receive one copy and the researcher retains the other copy.

Sample informed-consent forms

Sample adult and child informed-consent forms and a youth assent form are provided in exhibits 7.7, 7.8, and 7.9, respectively (adapted from Bernie Newman at Tufts University).

Confidentiality training

Issues of confidentiality should be discussed in training sessions. Discuss the

legal and ethical consequences of violating confidentiality for the program with the team members and consider having data collectors sign a pledge of confidentiality (United Way of America 1996). A sample pledge is provided as exhibit 7.10.

Recruitment Checklist

The following is a brief checklist of things that should be considered when recruiting staff, agencies, and families to participate in the evaluation:

- **Determine eligibility.** Determine and lay out conditions for participation in the evaluation.
- **Determine who will be responsible for recruiting participants.** Select one or two persons who are familiar with the evaluation requirements to recruit potential participants for the evaluation.
- **Develop incentives and ways to reduce or remove disincentives.** A number of things can be done to increase the likelihood that individuals will participate in the evaluation. Consider providing financial incentives; reduce the burden of responding by using administrative records rather than personal interviews when possible; minimize the intrusiveness of questions; and minimize the number of questions asked.
- **Make decisions about what is explained to participants.** Decide what information is explained to participants during recruitment and administration of questionnaires, such as how much time will be required of them.

“Another CAC wanted us to do an evaluation, but the parent questionnaire took 30 minutes. It was too long—and a lot of paperwork. Five to ten minutes is okay.”

- **Follow ethical standards of informed consent.** Produce an informed-consent form for participants to sign.
- **Pay vigorous attention to the well-being of participants.** The well-being of participants can be demonstrated by providing assurances of their privacy, promoting mutual education and respect, and avoiding scientific vernacular, such as the term “subjects,” which is a form of depersonalization.
- **Maintain contact with participants.** If followup contact will be necessary, be sure to maintain ongoing contact with families.
- **Keep track of reasons clients/families decline to participate.** This information will be useful when results are interpreted, and the funding agency will be particularly interested in this information.

Notes

1. Permission to use this form was granted by Victoria Weisz, Ph.D., M.L.S., personal communication, April 3, 2002.
2. For additional information about maintaining contact with research participants, see Dutton, Mary Ann et al., “Recruitment and Retention in Intimate Partner Violence Research,” Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Justice, National Institute of Justice, September 2003, NCJ 201943.